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Authoritarian Neoliberalism in AKP's Turkey: An Industrial Relations Perspective

Didem Özkiziltan, Hertie School of Governance, Berlin Germany

Authoritarian neoliberal governance of industrial relations is on the rise around the world, displaying remarkable similarities across countries with similar democratic political structures. However, despite a certain degree of resemblance, countries have been following divergent paths rendering each case unique in terms of its experience. This article explains the specific path through which authoritarian neoliberalism was materialised in the governance of Turkey's industrial relations under AKP rule. It is purported that AKP's pursuit of authoritarian neoliberalism in its governance of industrial relations shares certain similarities with the emerging market economies, which have a less democratic political system. However, it is contended that the governance of Turkey's industrial relations under AKP leadership embodies spatially and temporally distinct characteristics integrating long-established authoritarian institutional structures and practices with neoliberal ideology, powerful political alliances, Islamic values, repressive practices and mounting resistance, thus rendering it a unique form of authoritarian neoliberalism.

Introduction

The congruity between neoliberalism and authoritarianism has caught significant scholarly attention over the years. Currently, increasing numbers of scholars consider neoliberalism, as Brown (2005: 38) aptly put it, as being 'compatible with, and sometimes even productive of, authoritarian, despotic, paramilitaristic, and corrupt state forms as well as agents within civil

society' (see e.g. Diamond, 2015; Bruff, 2016; Huq and Ginsburg, 2017; Kiely, 2017; Tansel, 2017). Accordingly, the concept 'authoritarian neoliberalism' has become a buzzword amongst a group of authors commonly used to denote 'historically specific set of capitalist accumulation strategies that both exacerbate the existing, structural trends in the political organization of capitalism and embody distinct practices geared towards unshackling accumulation at the expense of democratic politics and popular participation' (Tansel, 2017: 6). The scholarly literature suggests two main characteristics for identifying authoritarian modes of neoliberal governance. That is, such regimes (1) undermine or restrain public involvement in policymaking, and (2) protect neoliberal policies through a collection of coercive instruments that include curbing the opportunities for collective resistance and diminishing formal liberties (Bruff, 2016; Tansel, 2017).

According to the general lines of the narrative that is widely used across the scholarly literature, authoritarian neoliberalism is on the rise around the globe taking on different directions in different settings (Bruff, 2016; Kiely, 2017; Tansel, 2017). In some instances, particularly among the emerging market economies, it is manifested by an overall illiberal and antidemocratic turn in the political arena, as has been the case in countries like Russia, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Turkey, Thailand and Venezuela (Diamond, 2015; Huq and Ginsburg, 2017). In others, especially in the more developed ones of the Western world, this has taken the direction of curbing the opportunities for collective resistance in specific socioeconomic spheres through constitutional and legal adjustments (Bruff, 2014; Kennedy, 2016; McBride and Mitrea, 2017; Wigger, 2018).

Despite the existence of a rich body of research on authoritarian neoliberalism, some authors have raised their concerns regarding the lack of scholarly attention to the diverse trajectories that authoritarian neoliberal turns take. For, countries are embedded in the established paths of institutional structures and practices, political regimes and struggles, thus

rendering each country unique in its experience (Geddes, 1999; Falleti, 2011; Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz, 2017; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018). Indeed, as Geddes (1999: 121) has rightly pointed out ‘different kinds of authoritarianism differ from each other as much as they differ from democracy’.

A closer look at the extant literature suggests that the diversity of authoritarian paths to neoliberalism becomes highly conspicuous regarding issues relating to labour markets and industrial relations, especially when the countries are grouped in accordance with their democratic characteristics. Indeed, for instance, research on the countries that have more established democracies suggests that, the increasing authoritarian stance adopted by neoliberal governments/supranational bodies has effectively decreased the workers’ opportunities for improving their wages and working conditions through rearrangement of traditional industrial relations institutions in such a way as to empower business (Kennedy, 2016; Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz, 2017; McBride and Mitrea, 2017; Wigger, 2018). For instance, following the Global Financial Crisis of 2007- 2008, in Greece, wage-setting practices became increasingly fragmented, unions rights to collectively bargain at the company level were weakened and the determination of the minimum wage was passed from the social partners to the government (Kennedy, 2016). Likewise, in the Spanish context, during the same period companies were allowed to make a cut down on wages pursuant to their profits, redundancy procedures were eased, and collective bargaining was decentralised (Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz, 2017).

The research on the countries with less democratic forms of government, on the other hand, highlights two key aspects in describing the governance of labour policies under the grip of authoritarian neoliberalism. In the first instance, there is the states’ concerted effort to transform/disable the already problematic democratic institutions with the aim of further undermining labour’s possibilities for democratic expression of alternative policies regarding

work and wider socioeconomic issues. Regarding which, Solfrini (2001) argues that Peru's democratisation process has always been accompanied by high levels of hostility towards labour, lack of political dialogue, reduced labour rights and persistent efforts to eliminate workers and unions from the political domain. Similarly, Chiu (2011) maintains that Taiwanese trade unions' endeavours to play their political role as the workers' representatives in wider socioeconomic and democratic reforms during the period when the nation underwent a political liberalisation process in the late 1980s, were ruthlessly cracked down on with the strikes being broken by police, independent trade union leaders and activists being fired as well as criminalised (also see Ashwin, 2011; Atzeni and Ghigliani, 2011; Bishara, 2018).

Second, authoritarian governments have set out to appeal to a different spectrum of interests, such as those of business, international finance organisations, the peasantry, poorer population or conciliatory workers' unions, in order to diminish the power of an independent and confrontational labour movement. For instance, Atzeni and Ghigliani (2011) note that the speedy and massive privatisation program undertaken during the early 1990s under the auspices of the IMF and the World Bank in Argentina, occurred in an ideological climate where the rule makers blamed the public sector unions so as to prioritise their members narrow interests at the cost of the economy and the consumers. Likewise, Solfrini (2001) remarks how the authoritarian neoliberal transformation of Peru's industrial relations during the early 1990s, which resulted in labour's substantial loss of power vis-a-vis the state and the employers, took place against the background of a mass poverty alleviation programme that was used to generate the political support of the poor population for the regime (also see Chiu, 2011; Bishara, 2018).

Despite the resemblances observed within the groups of countries sharing similar democratic political structures, the literature reviewed above also suggests that significant discrepancies exist within each group. For example, while in Greece the authoritarian

neoliberal turn in industrial relations policies was predominantly driven and forged by the IMF and the EU (Kennedy, 2016), in the Spanish context this process was shaped through the strain of external pressures, as well as being stimulated by the historical authoritarian structures within the state (Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz, 2017). In Peru, the abovementioned drastic reduction in workers' individual and collective rights was implemented almost with no political opposition from labour and other sections of society (Solfrini, 2001), while in Argentina, trade unions exhibited a fragmented response against the market reforms oscillating between calls for increased state protection to social movement strategies (Atzeni and Ghigliani, 2011).

Currently, Turkey is considered to be an important case for understanding authoritarian forms of neoliberal governance and there is an emerging body of literature documenting this process across the socioeconomic and political spheres (see Özden *et al.*, 2017; Bilgiç, 2018; Kaygusuz, 2018; Özyürek *et al.*, 2018; Tansel, 2018a; 2018b; Yeşil, 2018). This budding strand of literature also tackles the issue of the Justice and Development Party's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, hereafter the AKP) labour politics across which authoritarian neoliberalism is practically understood as a two-pronged process. Regarding the first, there is the state's deployment of a wide-range of authoritarian policy and practices in the spheres of work and industrial relations designed to foster and unburden neoliberal capital accumulation. The second part of the process concerns the state and capital's concerted efforts towards hampering workers' collective resistance against authoritarian neoliberal policy and practices (see Özveri, 2012; Gülmez, 2013; Çelik, 2015a; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018).

Across this body of literature, some authors directly characterise the AKP's labour policies as authoritarian neoliberal. For instance, in a recent article, Bozkurt-Güngen (2018) investigated the historical origins and present-day expressions of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey's labour markets maintaining that the AKP has inherited and broadened an

authoritarian repertoire in the domain of industrial relations, by means of which, it has systematically prevented labour's collective-democratic opposition. In their co-authored study, Akça and Özden (2015) asserted that in their dealing with the working class, AKP rulers have pursued an authoritarian neoliberal path through which they not only achieved individualisation of employment relations, but also increased workers' loyalty and obedience to the party's politics (also see Oğuz, 2012).

However, not all authors within this scholarly debate use the exact phrase authoritarian neoliberalism. Despite this, there exists a respectable amount of research drawing attention to the increasing authoritarian characteristics of neoliberal labour politics pursued under AKP rule. Defining the AKP's neoliberal labour policy and practices as 'authoritarian flexibilisation' Çelik (2015a) argues that two features, namely, flexibility in individual labour relations and authoritarianism in collective labour relations, define the main characteristics of the AKP's neoliberal labour regime. In an article where Gülmez (2013) criticised Turkey's new collective labour legislation promulgated in 2012, he purported that the neoliberal socioeconomic policies pursued under AKP rule have shaped the policymaking process of this law. According to him, this situation paved the way for continuity and reinforcement of Turkey's three-decade old authoritarian industrial relations regime that historically hinged on the main principle of 'unfreedom of association'. In their recent co-authored book, Gürcan and Mete (2017) investigated the ways in which neoliberalism with its increasing authoritarian characteristics have shaped the power of the Turkish working class in organising and struggling for its collective interests. Their argument is that neoliberalism in Turkey diminished the collective power of labour, whereby it produced fragmentation within the working-class, not only through public policies, but also through cultural differentiation amongst the workers (also see Koç, 2012; Özveri, 2012; Uçkan, 2013).

This diverse body of literature provides us with an understanding of the disciplining power of the AKP's authoritarian neoliberalism on labour, its interference with the labour's opportunities to become involved in decision-making processes as well as its obstruction of the workers' democratic and traditional avenues for opposing the policy and practices regarding their working conditions. Nevertheless, in all these accounts the manner in which authoritarian neoliberalism unfolds in Turkey's current labour-capital relations, in other words, its main characteristics making it temporarily and spatially distinct to the Turkish case, is largely absent. Thus, the main question to be addressed in this article is: "How is the authoritarian neoliberalism being manifested in industrial relations under AKP rule?" To address this, there is integration and interpretation of the resources from: 1) scholarly literature on Turkey's industrial relations; 2) reports from national and international bodies; 3) media accounts reporting on the AKP's socioeconomic policy and practices; and 4) discourse adopted by the AKP leadership.

This article contributes to the scholarly literature by shedding light on the highly under-researched subject of the unique pathway the AKP followed regarding authoritarian neoliberal governance of industrial relations. It highlights the historical continuities and the changes observed in the long-established paths of institutional structures, practices and political alliances in domain of industrial relations under the AKP rule. However, this research is still limited in scope, for it solely includes workers under individual employment contracts, thus, excluding civil servants. The reason for this limitation stems from two reasons. First, civil servants have always been subject to different regulations in their collective initiatives and their relations with the state have completely taken a different historical path (Çelik, 2014a; Özmen, 2017). Second, the AKP's policy and practices designed to discipline civil servants and their unions embrace a different range of authoritarian repertoire of repression, including, but not limited to, prohibition of the right to strike, the state's payment of trade union membership fees

and the facilitation of promotion for the members of pro-AKP civil servant unions (Çelik, 2014a). Such discrepancies call for further research that cannot be covered in the limited space allocated for this article.

Authoritarian Neoliberalism in Turkey's Industrial Relations

The AKP has been in power under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, without interruption, since 2002. Prevailing scholarly opinion holds that its ascendance to and consolidation of power has owed much to the party's unique neoliberal-Islamist identity and Western-leaning developmental agenda that promised Turkish society a 'new' Turkey, with high levels of economic wealth and development (Özdikmenli and Ovalı, 2014; Akyol, 2016; Kayaoğlu, 2016). This new Turkey, as the leaders of the young AKP pledged, would also set its sights on socioeconomic justice, freedom, democracy and human rights for all (AKP, 2002). True to its promises, during its initial years in power the AKP adopted an ambitious socio-political development agenda with the aim of converging Turkey's institutions towards standards of democracy and the European norms (Keyman and Gümüşçü, 2014). Nevertheless, after its second landslide victory in the 2007 general elections, the party adopted an authoritarian-neoliberal perspective to societal issues, including the sphere of industrial relations, that deepened over time (Akyol, 2016; Tuğal, 2016; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018)

However, it would be wrong to claim that governance of industrial relations displaying authoritarian characteristics in a way that empowers the state and the business vis-à-vis organised labour is a new phenomenon in Turkey, for this is far from case. Since the Turkish republic was established as a capitalist state in 1923, and as the country passed through different politico-economic periods, policies and practices shaping labour-capital relations have prioritised the state and business interests, thus frequently restricting and even occasionally removing, workers' freedom of association, right to collective bargaining as well as the right

to strike. From the time the Turkish republic was established in 1923 until the early years of the post-World War II period, during when the young republic was ruled by a single party and the statist political economy was at its heights, the freedom of association, right to collective bargaining and right to strike were completely banned (Makal, 1999; Sülker, 2004a). The ban on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining were lifted right after the end of the Second World War, when the country chose the path of multi-party democracy and a more liberalized market economy that was foreseen to be driven by private-sector industrialisation. During these years, however workers' right to strike remained prohibited and no protective measure was taken to protect their use of the right to collective bargaining (Makal, 2002; Özkızıltan, 2013; Özkızıltan and Çelik, 2018). Historical evidence also reveals that, starting from the early years of the republic, ruling cadres continuously made use of oppressive instruments, including persecution, arbitrary detention, and imprisonment of those defending left-wing and pro-labour ideals (Ahmad, 1995; Sülker, 2004b; Çelik, 2010b).

The 1960s and the following decade set the stage for great strides being made in the country's field of industrial relations. During this era, Turkey set its development prospects on pluralist democracy and inward-looking import-substitution industrialisation (Avcıoğlu, 1968; Boratav, 2009). These were accompanied by workers' granting of their collective rights and freedoms, both in law and in practice, which for the first time in the Republic's history, placed labour on an equal footing vis-à-vis the state and employers, thereby introducing a greater dynamism to the country's industrial relations (Talas, 1992; Güzel, 1996). Labour-capital relations took on a different turn in the early 1980s, when Turkey adopted a neoliberal vision of development, which included opening up the economy to global competition, keeping down the cost of labour and deepening of market relations with the privatisation of public sector activities. Amongst other institutional changes, this new path to capitalist development required a profound transformation in the institutions governing employment relations

(Kazgan, 2006; Boratav, 2009). The initial and the major legal changes to the institutional framework of labour-capital relations were made under the authority of the military government, which assumed power in September 1980 by means of a coup. In an environment where labour was completely silenced, Turkey's industrial relations legislation was re-institutionalised to inhibit workers' freedom of association, their rights to collective bargaining and their right to strike (Çetik and Akkaya, 1999; Özkızıltan, 2013).

Turkey returned to its fragile multi-party democratic system with free elections being held towards the end of 1983. The military junta's intervention into the domain of industrial relations left a deep imprint on its institutional framework, as very few amendments were made to the industrial relations legislation for decades to come (Gülmez, 2006). Furthermore, the demands of labour were placed under the state's firm discipline and, judicial harassment of trade unions, imprisonment of trade unionists, police brutality and violence against peaceful demonstrators came to define industrial relations practices in post-1980 Turkey (Amnesty International, 1997; 1998).

Turkey's neoliberal path to development gained increasingly authoritarian characteristics following the AKP's ascendance to power, with the priority being given to the unburdening of capital accumulation and creation of top-down and undemocratic socioeconomic governance (Keyman and Gümüüşçü, 2014; Adaman *et al.*, 2017). Scholars agree that, in this process, the AKP has not only followed in the steps of its predecessors, but also took additional strides to tip the balance of power further against labour in the domain of industrial relations (Koç, 2012; Özveri, 2012; Çelik, 2013a; Gülmez, 2013; Uçkan, 2013). In this article, I purport that being comprised of two dimensions, these being authoritarian-conservative neoliberal policies on the institutional level and anti-labour practices on the level of workers' experiences, the AKP's authoritarian neoliberal governance of industrial relations displays distinct characteristics compared to emerging market economies having less

democratic political systems as well as to the previous authoritarian and authoritarian neoliberal structures that had shaped and steered Turkey's industrial relations. The way authoritarian neoliberalism is manifested in Turkish industrial relations under AKP rule is scrutinised next.

Authoritarian-Conservative Neoliberalism: The Institutions

The extant literature suggests that authoritarian neoliberalism pursued in Turkey's industrial relations under AKP rule involves three key institutional components: maintenance of authoritarian-neoliberal collective labour legislation, adoption of a conservative discourse, and the establishment of clientelist relationships with the workers and the Islamist trade unions. These are investigated below.

Maintenance of Authoritarian-Neoliberal Collective Labour Legislation

The AKP re-institutionalised Turkey's three-decade-old collective labour legislation in 2012, arguing for the urgent necessity of changing the rules regulating industrial relations (MoLSS, 2013). Indeed, Turkey had long been in need of a paradigm change in its collective labour legislation, which was put into practice by the military government in 1983 to accelerate Turkey's neoliberal capitalist development (Çetik and Akkaya, 1999; Özkızıltan, 2013), with heavy restrictions being placed on workers' rights to strike, collective bargaining, and the right to establish and join trade unions (Kutal, 1987; ETUI, 1988; ITUC, 2007). The AKP's decision to replace these laws, therefore, presented Turkey with an opportunity to improve its compliance with international labour standards and to empower workers collectively in dealing with workplace issues. Certainly, the provisions of the new law – Law No. 6356, The Law on Trade Unions and Collective Labour Agreements (hereafter LTUCLA) – brought about some improvements for workers: the requirement for a notary act to become a union member was abolished, the industry branch threshold to gain competency for collective bargaining was

lowered from 10 to three per cent, the age limit for becoming a union member was reduced from 16 to 15, and the conditions for establishing trade unions and their internal functioning were simplified (Özveri, 2012; Çelik, 2016).

However, as Çelik (2013a) rightly pointed out, in preparing this law, the policymakers while having been heavily influenced by the interests of national business groups, they almost entirely ignored the concerns of the national and international labour rights' advocates. Thus, it should come as no surprise that, the LTUCLA maintains the main authoritarian-neoliberal characteristics of its predecessor, some of which being: the LTUCLA only allows industry-based trade unions at the level of industrial branches and only permits the establishment of confederations as trade unions' umbrella organisations. It bans several groups of people, including students, judges, security guards, pensioners, and the unemployed, from establishing and joining trade unions. The law does not provide protection against anti-union discrimination to shop stewards working in small companies with less than 30 employees. It applies a double threshold requirement for trade unions to attain collective bargaining competence. It only permits strikes caused by a dispute during collective bargaining. It thus outlaws any strikes organised for political, economic, social, sympathy and solidarity reasons, subjecting workers participating in such strikes to penal sanctions. Moreover, it empowers the state to postpone strikes for 60 days, at the end of which compulsory arbitration is imposed.

[insert Figure 1]

The national and international proponents of labour rights and the majority of Turkish industrial relations scholars all agree that the provisions of the LTUCLA neither improves Turkey's compliance with international labour standards nor advances workers' collective rights and freedoms (DISK, 2012; EC, 2012; ITUC and ETUC, 2012; Özveri, 2012; Gülmez, 2013; Uçkan, 2013; Çelik, 2016). In fact, as the available evidence suggests, it became an

important tool in restricting the possibilities of workers from utilising their collective rights and freedoms. For instance, labour's right to strike has been severely impaired during the AKP's 16-year reign, as evident in the party's postponement of 15 strikes – including those organised at tire and glass factories, and a private bank – on the justification that they threaten general health, national security, and the economy (Evrensel, 2018). Likewise, the workers' prospects of exercising their freedom of association and right to collective bargaining have been remarkably reduced during the AKP era. As Figure 1 shows, while the trade union density has dropped by almost 50 percent, the percentage of workers whose wages and working conditions are regulated by a collective agreement has decreased more than threefold during the AKP's reign. The figure also shows that during this period the share of wages in the GDP plunged by 25 percent, an important sign indicating the declining power of labour.

Adoption of a Conservative Discourse

Since the AKP came to power, an Islamic-conservative tendency started to be strongly felt in discourses concerning industrial relations (Koç, 2012; Erdinç, 2014; Koray, 2015), displaying two defining characteristics. Firstly, these discourses were adopted to rationalise work-related injustice. In the aftermath of the 2014 *Soma* mining disaster, where 301 workers were killed, President Erdoğan, pointed to a series of such disasters from around the world, saying: 'these types of incidents are ordinary things, [accidents] are the nature of this [business]' (Bianet, 2014). Similarly, in his statement made after the 2010 *Zonguldak* mining disaster, where 30 workers were killed, the then Prime Minister Erdoğan stated: 'unfortunately these [accidents] are in the fate of [this] occupation. My brothers in this occupation are aware of these things when they enter this profession' (CNNTurk, 2010).

Second, the party leadership has continuously placed emphasis on the '*fraternity*' between labour and the capital (see Cindoğlu and Ünal, 2017, for an account on the

authoritarian-conservative discourse adopted by AKP on gender relations), whilst condemning the conflict of interests that shapes and drives industrial relations in capitalist economies (see Hizmet-İş, 2007; Gül, 2011; HaberTürk, 2015; Kocaeli Okuyor, 2015). ‘Don’t expect modesty only from the workers’, stated President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a speech delivered at the 22nd general assembly of Turkey’s largest trade union confederation, TÜRK-İŞ. He continued, saying, ‘Being employers, you also need to learn the economics of being modest [sic]. . . Whatever we have in this country, it belongs all of us. We will be Turkey all together in unison, greatness, vitality and fraternity’ (HaberTürk, 2015). Similarly, in a speech the Kayseri mayor and AKP member Mustafa Çelik stated: ‘we maintain our approach to workers as if they are our brothers, rather than in the framework of a worker-employer relationship’ (Kocaeli Okuyor, 2015). The Islamic-conservative rhetoric that the AKP leadership resorted to in the industrial relations sphere has played an important role in the party’s forging of its relationship with the trade unions, which is scrutinised next.

Establishment of Clientelist Relationships with the Workers and the Islamist Trade Unions

Stokes (2009: 605) defines political clientelism as ‘the proffering of material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (will you) support me?’ From this perspective, clientelist exchanges on the collective and individual levels, namely between the state and the trade unions and between the state and the workers have always been an important feature of the nation’s industrial relations. Indeed, as a glance at the institutional history of Turkey’s industrial relations indicates, on the collective level, initially clientelist linkages were built up between the governing parties and Turkey’s largest and oldest trade union confederation TÜRK-İŞ (Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions, *Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*) starting from its establishment in the year 1952. In representing labour’s interest, TÜRK-İŞ has adopted an ‘above party politics’ by way of which it fostered harmonious interactions with the political parties that held power. TÜRK-

İŞ's above party approach proved highly instrumental in materialising the economic interests of its rank-and-file members who were by and large public sector employees. Mutually, political parties holding or competing for power have found offering compromises to the TÜRK-İŞ-affiliated unions an effective method in increasing their appeal to the electorate as well as in maintaining the social peace and order in domain of industrial relations (Özkiziltan, 2003). However, TÜRK-İŞ's monopoly over representation of labour's interest has come to an end when Turkey's second trade unions' confederation DİSK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions – *Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*) was established by the trade unions representing workers of private sector in 1967. DİSK has embraced a confrontational perspective that emphasised class conflict, and established close links with the left-wing political parties regardless of their representational power in Turkish parliament (Koç and Koç, 2008; Çelik 2010b).

AKP's assumption of power in 2002 has changed the labour actor of this long-established clientelist relationship from TÜRK-İŞ to Turkey's Islamist trade union confederation, HAK-İŞ (The Confederation of Righteous Trade Unions, *Hak İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*) (see Koç, 2014; Akça and Özden, 2015; Durmaz, 2016). Observers of Turkish industrial relations assert that the trade unions affiliated with HAK-İŞ, together with its management, adopted a conciliatory position to achieve and maintain peace in the workplace as well as supporting the AKP's politics in the socioeconomic sphere (Dinler, 2012; Çelik, 2013a; Erdinç, 2014). In return for their non-confrontational approach, it is argued that the AKP gave the upper hand to HAK-İŞ-affiliated unions in labour-capital relations. For example, as it has been on various occasions reported, the party bent the rules to ease the process of HAK-İŞ-affiliated unions gaining collective bargaining competence in the workplaces. Similarly, the party leadership overlooked the pressures these unions exerted on management

and/or on the workers in the establishments where unions affiliated to other confederations were active (ITUC, 2009; 2010; DISK-AR, 2014).

[insert Figure 2]

The clientelist relationship established between the AKP and HAK-İŞ has significantly increased the latter's representative power under the former's rule. Indeed, as Figure 2 shows, HAK-İŞ-affiliated trade unions increased from six to 22 from 2003 to 2018 (MoLSS, 2003; HAK-İŞ, 2018b). Meanwhile, the total proportion of unionised workers HAK-İŞ represents increased from 11.4% to 35.8% (MoLSS, 2003; 2018). The Figure 2 also provides evidence that such a clientelist relationship remarkably eroded the collective power of workers that are not members of HAK-İŞ unions. Indeed, the numbers of unions affiliated with TÜRK-İŞ increased only from 33 to 34 between 2003 and 2018. Similarly, over the same time period, the unions affiliated with DİSK increased only from 20 to 22 (MoLSS, 2003; DİSK, 2018; TÜRK-İŞ, 2018). Furthermore, the proportion of total unionised workers represented decreased from 71.36% to 53.95% for TÜRK-İŞ and from 13.82% to 8.7% for DİSK (MoLSS, 2003; 2018).

At the individual level, on the other hand, political clientelism has always assumed a central part in political and social life of modern Turkey following Turkey's transition to a multi-party system in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War (Koç, 2002; Sayarı, 2011). The AKP has perpetuated this legacy and, in similar ways as its predecessors, offered social assistance that included yet not limited to free food and coal packages, cash transfers and free household appliances to a broad-based clientele (Sayarı, 2011; Demirtaş-Milz, 2012; Koç, 2012). However, AKP's political clientelism has significantly diverged from those pursued by the previous governments in that the AKP has also aimed at expanding the neoliberal market relations by integrating workers and their families in the socioeconomic

system as domestic consumers and credit users (see Koç, 2012; 2014; Akça and Özden, 2015; Durmaz, 2016; Bozkurt-Güngen, 2018).

Consequently, from the party coming to power until 2016, public social spending as a percent of GDP increased from 9% to 13.51% (OECD, 2018b), whilst household spending, calculated in million US Dollars, expanded threefold (OECD, 2018a) and household debt, including loans and debt securities as a share of GDP, escalated from 1.85% to 17.59% (IMF, 2018). Nevertheless, the AKP's political clientelism pursued on an individual level comes with a heavy cost to be shouldered by workers both individually and collectively. Indeed, as scholars have remarked, while social assistance provided by the AKP is piecemeal and irregular, requiring obedience to the authority (Çelik, 2010a; Durmaz, 2016), increasing household debt in reflection of escalating use of consumer credits and credit cards, has forced workers to stay away from confrontational trade unions in order to protect their jobs (Koç, 2012; 2014). The AKP's political clientelism on the individual level, therefore, on the one hand, increased its popular support, as workers experienced some improvement in their incomes through credit and/or social assistance. On the other, it 'fed into the formation of individualistic and competitive subjectivities' (Akça and Özden, 2015). All these, resultantly, diminished the power of independent and confrontational labour movement in Turkey, rendering a group of workers clients of the AKP regime. The party's establishment of clientelist relationships with the workers carried significant implications for labour's utilisation of its work-related collective rights and freedoms. Labour's experiences in industrial relations under AKP rule are investigated next.

Anti-Labour Practices: Workers' Experiences

Since the AKP came to power in 2002, repressive practices against organised labour such as judicial harassment of trade unions, arbitrary detention of trade unionists, recourse to police

brutality and violence against peaceful demonstrators relating to work or wider socioeconomic issues, and the opening of investigations into those engaging in peaceful union activities, became the order of the day (ITUC, 2009; 2010; ILO, 2013; ITUC, 2016a). The extant literature suggests that such violation of labour's rights rests on and exacerbates two long-established practices, namely: a fragmented labour movement and systematic and violent repression of collective action. These are examined below.

Fragmented Labour Movement

Observers of Turkey's current industrial relations will mostly agree that the AKP's pursuit of an authoritarian neoliberal political economy in the industrial relations sphere, while having empowered the state and business vis-à-vis organised labour (Özveri, 2012; Uçkan, 2013; Çelik, 2015a), at the same time created a highly fragmented labour movement in relation to workplace and wider socioeconomic issues (Dinler, 2012; Çelik, 2013b; Erdinç, 2014). However, this should not come to mean that the Turkish labour movement became fragmented under AKP rule, for in fact, this has always been a main feature of the labour movement in modern Turkey. In this respect, for instance, the first trade unions established following the removal of the ban on freedom of association in the aftermath of the Second World war were divided into two camps according to the necessity and urgency of the recognition of the right to strike or not (Sülker, 2004b; Çelik, 2010b). As the nation further industrialised and as the number of industrial workers escalated, labour's awareness regarding the significance of the right to strike increased. In fact, from the mid-1950s onwards, the recognition of the right to strike became the predominant interest of trade unions at the national level. During these years, trade unions' sole umbrella organisation TÜRK-İŞ being the confederation that had stood in favour of developing good relations with the ruling cadres since its establishment in 1952 also championed the acknowledgement of workers' right to strike, thus tightly binding the Turkish labour movement (Sülker, 2004a; Özkiziltan and Çelik, 2018).

Despite the majority of the workers' organisation joining forces in their efforts towards obtaining the right to strike (Özkızıltan and Çelik, 2018), following its recognition in the early 1960s, cleavages in labour movement reappeared. Such fragmentation manifested itself in the most concrete way in the rivalry between TÜRK-İŞ, adopting conciliatory unionism and a so-called above party politics; DİSK, which favoured class struggle, thus being inclined towards political unionism since its establishment in 1967; and HAK-İŞ, espousing an Islamist ideology with an emphasis on cooperation between labour and capital, following its establishment in 1976 (Kutal, 1977; Güzel, 1996; Koray, 1996; Koç, 2003). Furthermore, this failure of the trade unions to establish a nation-wide solidarity amongst them culminated in a soaring number of trade union confederations, jumping up to seven by 1978 (Özkızıltan, 2013).

DİSK and HAK-İŞ were closed down during the military takeover of September 1980. Whilst HAK-İŞ was authorised to operate in 1981, DİSK was not allowed to resume its activities until 1991 (Çetik and Akkaya, 1999; Özkızıltan, 2013). The first half of the 1990s represent a period of normalisation in Turkish trade unionism, with a renewed dynamism instigated by a workers' grassroots movement in protest against the neoliberal socioeconomic policies pursued by successive governments (Koray, 1994; Çetik and Akkaya, 1999; Doğan, 2013). Workers' peaceful mass mobilisation resulted in the formation of the 'Democracy Platform, Common Voice of Workers' in 1993, with the involvement of various civil society organisations and trade unions, including DİSK, TÜRK-İŞ and HAK-İŞ. However, this initiative proved to be rather short-lived and it was dissolved in 1995, with the main reason being political fragmentation and ideological confrontation between the member organisations (Koç, 2011).

The AKP's rise to power in 2002 ushered in the abovementioned establishment of a strong collaborative relationship between HAK-İŞ and the party. This further deepened the chasm in the Turkish trade union movement, becoming most noticeable in HAK-İŞ and its

affiliated unions' efforts towards publicly displaying their unconditional support for the AKP policies. For instance, in protest of the so-called 17-25 December corruption investigation incidence, which, according to the commentators aimed at threatening the authority of the then prime minister Mr Erdoğan (Deutsche Welle, 2013; The Guardian, 2013), HAK-İŞ issued a press release pledging its unshakable loyalty to the AKP (HAK-İŞ, 2013). In commemoration of the defeated coup of July 2016, which was organised by a faction within the Turkish Armed Forces, with the aim of overthrowing the AKP's administration (Guardian, 2016; BBC News, 2016), the confederation organised mass demonstrations, both in July 2017 and July 2018, warning the Turkish public against the sinister plans of traitors (HAK-İŞ, 2017; 2018a). Similarly, retaining its party allegiance, the confederation adopted a publicly uncritical stance during the legislation process of Turkey's new collective labour law (HAK-İŞ, 2012b; 2012a; Çelik, 2013a).

Nevertheless, all these should not suggest that the authoritarian neoliberalism pursued by the AKP in industrial relations sphere has resulted in a completely amenable labour force. Far from it, as was aptly denoted by Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz (2017: 43), 'even in the most difficult circumstances, workers find ways to resist and subvert the disciplining effects of authoritarian neoliberalism'. In this regard, the most vociferous and resistant workers' organisations against AKP policies happen to have been DİSK and its affiliated unions. For instance, DİSK actively participated in the 2013 Gezi park protests, which were attended by hundreds of thousands of people across the country in a challenge to the AKP's increasing authoritarian, conservative and neoliberal stance to socioeconomic issues (Gürçan and Peker, 2015). Likewise, the confederation, together with some other secular, pro-democratic non-governmental organisations, organised and attended the 'Freedom, peace, democracy, justice and labour' march, in January 2014 in Ankara, where the demonstrators protested against the authoritarian, corrupt and oppressive regime of the AKP (DİSK, 2014). Unlike DİSK, however,

TÜRK-İŞ adopted a much less critical approach towards the AKP's socioeconomic stance, which, according to observers, at times, projected a pro-AKP image (Aydın, 2015; Sendika.Org, 2015; Özsever, 2017). However, in 2012, TÜRK-İŞ joined DİSK in inviting the then President of the Republic to veto the Turkey's new collective labour law (Çelik, 2014b).

Resistance against the disciplining effects of the AKP's authoritarian neoliberalism has also appeared at the workplace level of industrial relations under AKP rule. Some notable examples of workers' resistance gaining popular media attention were: the 78-day collective protest organised by the workers employed in the state-owned tobacco and alcoholic beverages company, *Tekel*, against its privatisation in Winter 2009 (Yılmaz, 2011); the widespread industrial protests and wildcat strikes organised by metal workers against their employers and their conciliatory union in Spring 2015 (Çelik, 2015b); as well as the collective protests organised by the construction workers of Istanbul's new airport waged against the bad working conditions and oppressive control of employers and the AKP in Autumn 2018 (Independent, 2018).

However, it is important to note that much of the workers' workplace resistance goes underreported by the mainstream media in Turkey (Şen, 2018). Indeed, by scrutinising the entirety of local and national printed media, as well as some websites, a group of researchers identified 365 workplace-level workers' resistance that occurred in 2013 (Kaygısız, 2014), 795 in 2014 (Kaygısız, 2015), 628 in 2015, 420 in 2016 and 430 in 2017 (EÇT, 2018). An important point to note from these reports is that HAK-İŞ affiliated trade unions have been the least active in organised struggles at the workplace level, as they, for instance represented only seven percent of the workplace resistance in 2013 and four percent in 2014 (Kaygısız, 2014; 2015). In sum, these reports suggest that workers' resistance against unfair workplace practices is still possible despite the highly adverse political, legal, and practical circumstances under AKP rule.

The AKP's conservative discourse and its authoritarian neoliberal agenda, while paving the way for the development of a strong, harmonious relationship with the conciliatory organised labour, as represented by HAK-İŞ, has given rise to systematic and violent repression of organised resistance pertaining to those adopting confrontational perspective in relation to workplace and wider socioeconomic issues. Perusal of the available resources suggests that such repression has two aspects. First, in the same way as its predecessors, the AKP's oppression of labour has been operationalised through putting into use its legislative, judicial and executive power. Such repressive practices however differed from those pursued by previous governments in that they were imposed more violently and upon more workers than ever before. In this regard, the AKP's systematic and violent repression of collective action in industrial relations reached its pinnacle after the party declared a state of emergency following the abovementioned failed coup, in July 2016. During this period, as an ITUC report (2017: 30) aptly put it, '[t]rade unions and their members have been made public enemies' as attacks on trade union freedoms further mounted.

Indeed, in the aftermath of the coup, tens of thousands of trade union members, mostly in the public sector, were dismissed or suspended (ETUC, 2016); leaders and members of trade unions were attacked, arrested, and jailed; workers' rallies and protests were prohibited; and the police violently attacked demonstrators (ITUC, 2017). President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan succinctly summarised the function of the nation's state of emergency after the failed coup attempt: 'We carry out [this] state of emergency to assist business operations,' he stated while addressing investors in a recent meeting, continuing on to say that, 'now we instantly interfere in the workplaces when there is the threat of a strike, because they cannot shake our business world. We are using the state of emergency to this end' (BirGün, 2017).

Subsequently, it should not come as a surprise that the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) added Turkey to their list of the top 10 worst countries for working people in their ‘Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights’ in 2016 (ITUC, 2016b). Turkey made no improvement to working conditions during 2017 (ITUC, 2017) and so far, in 2018, thus being currently ranked amongst the world’s worst countries for workers, along with Algeria, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Colombia, Egypt, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, the Philippines, and Saudi Arabia (ITUC, 2018). The ITUC General Secretary described Turkey’s deteriorating industrial relations as one of the ‘clear examples of the combined assault on workers’ rights and other fundamental freedoms’ (ITUC, 2016c).

A second aspect characterising the systematic and violent repression of collective action under AKP rule, is the party’s leaving the workplace labour-capital relations to the complete discretion of employers, which, according to the observers, accounts to an unprecedented degree in modern Turkey’s history of industrial relations (Koç, 2012; Çelik, 2015a). Indeed, the national and international documents reporting on labour rights’ violations in Turkey widely claim that employers are given a freehand to deal with workers’ organised resistance at the workplace and thus, the frequent recourse to repressive measures to undermine such actions. Employer’s offensive manoeuvres include, yet are not limited to: dismissing unionised workers for reasons other than unionisation, initiating anti-union campaigns, harassing and intimidating unionised workers, calling for the police and gendarme to intervene in organised resistance, offering workers better wages, benefits, and positions, if they agree not to sign up to or resign from unions, singling out unionised workers as dangerous and unwanted people as well as forcing workers to sign up for yellow unions (Bakır and Akdoğan, 2009; ITUC, 2009; ILO, 2010; ITUC, 2010; 2012; ILO, 2014). Workers’ accounts of workplace-level industrial struggles substantiate such claims: ‘[Employers] dictate that workers not stand up for their rights, not raise their voice, everything will happen in the way we [the employers] want.

Namely, they ask for complete submission', remarks one worker in an interview that appeared in the pro-labour Turkish media (UİD-DER, 2012). In another interview, a worker asserts, 'Employers ... fire you when you stand upon your rights. Employers need workers to wait on them hand and foot' (UİD-DER, 2013). Another worker says, 'We lost our jobs because we wanted to work in decent conditions, we wanted democracy. Workers are attacked when they fight for their rights' (UİD-DER, 2011).

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to shed light on the highly under-researched issue of the main characteristics of authoritarian neoliberalism that are distinctive to industrial relations under AKP rule. The analysis of the specific path through which the AKP's authoritarian neoliberalism in labour-capital relations was materialised suggest that Turkey shares certain similarities with the emerging market economies having less democratic political systems. This resemblance becomes especially noticeable in the: 1) AKP's concerted efforts to transform/disable the already problematic institutions to undermine further labour's democratic opportunities for improving wages and working conditions; 2) its pursuit of policies to appeal to the interests of workers as consumers, credit users and recipients of social assistance, thus diminishing the power of the independent and confrontational labour movement in Turkey.

However, the analysis has revealed that despite the similarities, AKP rule has followed a unique pathway marked by historical continuities on the one hand and the changes on the other in governance of industrial relations concerning institutions as well as workers' experiences. The continuities are clearly evidenced in the AKP's preservation of authoritarian and neoliberal characteristics in Turkey's new collective labour legislation, its maintenance of clientelist relationships with the workers and with particular trade unions, its perpetuation of

the historical fragmentation of the country's labour movement and its dependence on labour repression in dealing with conflicts related to workplace and wider socioeconomic issues.

Despite being highly embedded in the long-established paths of institutional structures and practices; the findings also indicate that the AKP's pursuit of authoritarian neoliberalism in its governance of industrial relations represents an important break from the past. Such discontinuity becomes manifest most remarkably in four aspects. First, the party has embraced Islamic values in its relations with the labour. This became most visible on the one hand in its adoption of an Islamist-conservative discourse in issues concerning labour, on the other in its replacement of the labour actor of the long-established clientelist relationship between the state and trade unions from TÜRK-İŞ to Turkey's Islamist trade union confederation, HAK-İŞ. Second, the AKP integrated workers and their families in the socioeconomic system as domestic consumers and credit users. This, while having improved their incomes to a certain degree, significantly increased household debt in reflection of escalating use of consumer credits and credit cards. In doing so, the party not only further expanded the neoliberal market relations but also rendered a group of workers clients of the party regime forcing them staying away from confrontational trade unions in order to protect their jobs.

Third, the party deepened the chasm in the Turkish trade union movement, further diminishing the power of independent and confrontational labour movement in Turkey. And fourth, the repressive practices the party adopted in confrontational situations in relation to workplace and wider socioeconomic issues were imposed more violently and upon more workers than ever before. This situation, combined with the party's leaving of the workplace labour-capital relations to the complete discretion of employers, has placed Turkey amongst the top ten worst countries for working people in ITUC's Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights since 2016. However, the analysis also suggests that, one group of workers

continue putting up resistance to authoritarian neoliberalism, despite having to face highly adverse political, legal, and practical circumstances under AKP rule.

Therefore, I maintain that, Turkey's industrial relations under AKP rule displays spatially and temporally distinct characteristics, thus rendering it a unique form of authoritarian neoliberal governance compared to both emerging market economies having less democratic political systems as well as the previous authoritarian and authoritarian neoliberal structures that had shaped and steered Turkey's industrial relations.

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